

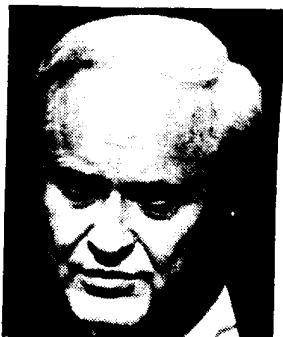
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EXCERPT

## INQUIRY

## Topic: THE INSIDE STORY

**Jack Anderson, 62, called the Paul Revere of journalism, writes The Washington Merry-Go-Round column, which appears in 900 newspapers. His reports are also aired on the Mutual Broadcasting System and Metro-media TV. He received the Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for his reporting. Anderson was interviewed by USA TODAY's Barbara Reynolds.**



Jack Anderson

**USA TODAY:** How do you think the press performed in covering the recent TWA hostage crisis?

**ANDERSON:** Newsmen need to be good citizens, so they have to put the welfare of the nation ahead of the scoop occasionally. I'm not going to go so far as to say that they ought to cooperate with the government. They have to cooperate with the nation. In a crisis like that one, we don't have to put a mike in the hands of killers and kidnappers. I don't think this is in the national interest; it's in the interest of the hostages. The press should not get in the way of the negotiations. I don't think the press should play the role of God.

**USA TODAY:** How does that observation square with your 1981 column scooping the national press with a report that President Carter had planned an invasion to rescue U.S. hostages from Iran?

**ANDERSON:** I don't see any inconsistency at all. Those columns came to us from a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was worried — I mean worried sick — that President Carter was going to make a second attempt to rescue the hostages — an attempt that would fail. So I was actually dealing with the people who were supposed to carry out the rescue attempt — the people who had been ordered by the White House to make the preparations. These people just did not

think it would work.

**USA TODAY:** Why did you write about it? Wasn't it inconsistent with your belief that the press must do what's good for the nation?

**ANDERSON:** The press should report it any time you get this kind of opposition to a presidential plan. I have a flat rule not to write about ongoing military operations, as long as everybody involved believes in what they're doing. But if there is a division, if there are people who believe it could backfire, then it becomes a legitimate story we have to look into.

**USA TODAY:** Has investigative reporting lost its glamor?

**ANDERSON:** I was an investigative reporter back when investigative reporters were pariahs. It was nice to be a folk hero for a little while. Now we're pariahs again. But there is no question that people do not like the messenger who brings them bad news. An investigative reporter is always digging up stories that people in power don't want to see published. When we antagonize the people in power, we also are not really going to please our editors and publishers, because the editors and publishers all too often have a close relationship with the people in power. In any case, they have to respond to the people in power.

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## We're hedging a little now to avoid lawsuits

**USA TODAY:** Does the press sometimes go overboard in its reporting of personal or sensitive information?

**ANDERSON:** That's no threat to the First Amendment. What becomes a threat to the First Amendment is if the government tells us we cannot run these stories. If the government says we can't, then I have to run them, just to prove the government is wrong. We cannot allow the government to define the news and we cannot allow the government to dictate to the newspapers. But we should have the eminent good sense not to run stories that are going to cost human lives, or to pry into the private affairs of people to the extent it becomes degrading. People value their reputations. If someone has violated a public trust, of course, it is your duty to report it, but you better be sure you're right. You wouldn't just shoot a gun aimlessly in a crowd. That's irresponsible. It's equally irresponsible to shoot words, unless you know that they're pointed in the right direction and that they're hitting the right people.

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**USA TODAY:** You tend to go in the opposite direction from the journalism establishment in Washington.

**ANDERSON:** I tend to cover the news as I see it — to cover it alone, to find my own sources, and not to read other newsmen's carbons, and not to exchange information with other people in my profession. This seems to be the exception. Most reporters, out of insecurity,

to make sure they're not getting scooped, talk to their competitors to find out what they have. The result is that it all tends to come out the same. I don't consult anybody. I don't go to the same sources. I don't talk to my colleagues about what they're writing. I don't care what they're writing. I tend to write my own stories. I don't follow the herd.

**USA TODAY:** You uncovered a CIA-Mafia plot to kill Cuban leader Fidel Castro. Was that a difficult story to report?

**ANDERSON:** It was the most difficult because I had to get information from two of the most close-mouthed organizations in the world: the Mafia and the CIA. Neither of them wanted to talk about it. It took about two years to get the story. I got it a little piece at a time, putting the jigsaw pieces together until finally I was able to confront and to name the actual Mafia killers and their CIA contacts. I would consider it the most difficult story I ever had to break.

**USA TODAY:** Isn't your life sometimes in jeopardy? Didn't Watergate figure Gordon Liddy once intend to bump you off?

**ANDERSON:** Liddy, according to his own book — and I knew about it before he wrote the book — had intended to come gunning for me. But given his record, I was not in much danger.